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# Incentives for Volunteerism in Extension Programming: Some Structural/Motivational Concerns

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## Introduction

Have you ever had difficulty getting farmers, homemakers, community leaders, youth, or other people interested in Extension education programs? Participation and involvement in group learning activities and the use of volunteers as teachers and facilitators are the life blood of Cooperative Extension. As Extension staff members, we use many communication methods to get people to come to meetings and to get them more involved in our programs. Letters, phone calls, news articles, and a variety of other methods sometimes generate only a handful of people and even fewer long-term program participants. Apathy and indifference often have been cited as rationales for noninvolvement by clientele. However, there is little evidence to support the claim that people are apathetic or indifferent.

Another viewpoint stresses that noninvolvement may result when groups and institutions are not structured in a manner that promotes participation and involvement. This bulletin focuses on the structure of groups and the motivational devices used to promote involvement, participation, and increase volunteerism. We need to understand that noninvolvement and lack of participation can be explained in terms of group or organizational structure and individual motivation. We suggest ways to structure programs and motivate citizens to become or remain involved in Extension activities.

## Group Structure

A key idea we need to understand is structure. People imagine the framework of a house when they think about structure. First, one builds the framework, then puts on the siding and the insulation. When economists and sociologists talk about group structure, they mean roughly the same thing. The internal structure of an organization is the officers, the by-laws, and, in general, those fixed, written regularities by which an organization runs. The external structure, however, is how the organization

appears to clients and the general public. Because people know us through our visible, outside appearance we have to think about the benefits our organization has to offer. The external structure must contain the benefits and rationales to induce people to become involved in organizational efforts and participate or volunteer on a regular basis. Some structures tend to promote volunteerism in the organization's activities while others seem to hinder involvement. The productive structures are those that take advantage, consciously or unconsciously, of knowledge concerning individual behavior and group structure.

## Rational Action Toward Collective Goods

A premise of this discussion is that individuals will not necessarily participate in Cooperative Extension programs that deal with collective goods. Collective goods are items which individuals cannot be excluded from consuming, e.g., street lights, public TV, clean air. For instance, rational people will not necessarily act to achieve common or group objectives. Let us look at the basis for that statement. Why will individuals not participate in collective goods programs even though we think those people will benefit? For one thing, each individual only receives a personal share of the benefits from the successful program, but those who participate (help develop or organize the program) pay a cost of time, money, or energy. This cost is not paid by nonparticipants. Therefore, it may be rational for each individual not to participate and let others work to provide the collective good. Of course, the cumulative effect is that no one participates and the good is never provided.

As one can see, individually rational decisions do not necessarily lead to rational group actions (i.e., rational individuals will not necessarily act to further the interests of the group). Occasionally, we uncover circumstances where altruism seems to be the only

logical explanation, but in the normal course of events, we probably should not count on altruistic responses. Designing and planning for self-interested responses will provide a set of incentives and structure where altruism and self-interest lead to similar behavior; one can be pleasantly surprised if altruistic responses are observed. The extent of participation is, in part, due to the structure of the group as well as the type of good being sought.

The first step in analyzing the structural causes of noninvolvement is to examine group characteristics. Groups which provide a collective good are characterized by a quality called inclusiveness. Market groups (those pursuing individual goods) attempt to restrict movement into their group and encourage movement out of the group. Nonmarket groups (those pursuing collective goods) usually wish to encourage movement into their group and discourage movement out of the group. Thus, our topic of concern: *how to encourage movement (participation and involvement) into the group and discourage movement out of the group*. Essentially, we are interested in how to get new people to participate in our programs and to maintain or increase the involvement of those who are presently participating. The success of most programs in Cooperative Extension is, in part, considered a function of the number of participants as well as the quality of their involvement.

Another dimension to examine is how group size affects involvement, or movement into and out of the group. We have two structures to consider: (1) the types of organizational incentives used to get individuals to become involved, and (2) the size and composition of the group. But, we assume each person is a rational being who can weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the collective good, then decide upon involvement or noninvolvement.

There are several basic size categories into which groups can be placed (Figure 1). The first, of course, is a *single individual*. However, this is a trivial category because if a single individual is the only member, he/she does not pursue a collective good but rather a private good. The second category is the *privileged group*, where each of its members, or subgroup of members, has an incentive to see

that the collective good is provided, even if they (the group) has to bear the full burden of providing it. In *intermediate groups* no single member would get a share of the benefit sufficient to give an incentive to provide the goods by themselves; thereby, distinguishing it from a privileged group. However, the group is small enough that members will notice whether other individuals are participating in the effort to provide the collective good.

This distinction is clearer when examining a concrete issue such as certain types of community services. In many communities inadequate street lighting presents problems for public safety and convenience. In some small communities a few individuals or families will decide to construct lighting in their neighborhood even though they bear the full cost and only receive their portion of the total benefit. This would be an example of what is called a *privileged group*. In other cases, no individual or subset of the group sees enough advantage to provide lighting for the entire neighborhood and each individual sees no advantage to act unless everyone else also puts in lighting.

Whether a collective good in these groups will or will not be provided is largely a function of whether a subgroup will act as a privileged group. This will be correlated with the social and economic class of group members as well as individual and community characteristics. Individual and community characteristics may include altruism or sense of responsibility as well as more general properties such as the traditions of the community.

The fourth major category is *latent groups*. Latent groups have a large number of members and individuals who are not significantly affected by the nonparticipation of another individual. In fact, any individual member of the collectivity would probably not know all other members of the collectivity. As one may have now guessed, many Extension collective good programs involve latent groups. This type of group has the fewest incentives for an individual to participate and lower likelihood of activation than a privileged group. In latent groups, the group is large enough that peer pressure or social disapproval for nonparticipation is not a motivator and each individual may take the "let George do it" attitude.

GROUP TYPES	SIZE	PROBABILITY OF PROVISION OF COLLECTIVE GOOD
1. Single individuals	Solo	Does not apply
2. Privileged groups	Limited	Medium
3. Intermediate groups	Large	Low
4. Latent	Massive	Extremely low

Figure 1. Group type and probability for providing a collective good.

There are three separate, but cumulative, factors which act to keep large groups of individuals from furthering their collective interests. First, the larger the group, the smaller the proportionate benefits. In a group of 10, each individual potentially would receive 10 percent of the benefit of a group action, while in a group of 100, each individual would only receive 1 percent of the total benefit. This smaller fraction is less inducement for any individual to perform group-oriented actions. If the group cannot receive sufficient collective good, it may not receive any benefits. Second, there is less likelihood in a large group than in a smaller group of activation of a privilege group which might help obtain the collective good. Essentially, lower per capita incentives will be inadequate to induce a few members to work together to produce the collective good for the entire group. The third factor relates to the cost of organizing. The larger the number of members in the group, the greater the costs of getting organized and, therefore, the higher the hurdle that must be overcome before any of the collective good can be obtained.

## What Can Be Done?

The role of different structures and goods is illustrated by examining an organization which relies on voluntary participation to provide a public/collective good. The Red Cross is highly successful in insuring adequate blood supplies for their regional centers. They have organized so a small cadre of donors (2 percent) contribute a large proportion of the blood. The Red Cross uses a combination of moral persuasion, publicity, and honors for the donors, as well as use of sponsoring organizations. Individuals who donate set amounts of blood are given public honor and status by the organization through news releases, donor dinners, and employer certificates.

Essentially, an organizer needs to find a way that individuals who participate in providing a collective good will receive "extra" benefits, or the organizer needs to find a "privileged" group to supply the collective good. For extra benefits to be successful incentives, they must accrue to those who are involved in providing or ensuring the provision of the collective good, and must be denied to those not involved. These "selective benefits" can be viewed as rewards for involvement and may assume a number of forms. These rewards may be social, psychological, or monetary. They are inducements that promote future contributions. An example from 4-H can help illustrate the use of selective benefits.

While many 4-H youth participate in county fairs, it is difficult to get leaders involved in long-term fair activities or in projects that take a lot of time. A county agent began to personally seek involvement of some parents, regardless of whether or not their children did well in the judging. He built-up a core group of volunteers with a unique set of incentives over which he had control. After serving on the fair

committee for 4-H, they would be asked to serve as fair "resource people" for Extension's annual conference. The volunteers would get free travel and meals (a money incentive). Also, they would be able to get recognition from the state college for being experts in their field (a social status incentive). The county agent provided further recognition to the volunteers with press coverage of their travels (more social status incentives).

In large, latent groups, a structure which utilizes selective incentives will induce some rational individuals to become involved in achieving the collective good. The incentive must be selective in the sense of being provided to those who are involved in furthering the group's interests and denied to those who are not involved. An example may help illustrate the nature of selective incentives.

In one community, a continuing problem was how to get people involved in a local charitable organization. While everyone thought it was a worthwhile cause and necessary for the community, no one wanted to spend much energy. A local minister determined that the people needed some additional inducements, so he started a campaign in which a great deal of recognition was given to volunteers through newspaper stories and awards banquets. He combined this with giving the volunteers more responsibility than carrying collection cans. Over the course of a few years, the minister managed to turn the organization into one for which many people volunteered because it provided a sense of accomplishment and achievement along with some responsibility and recognition.

In this example, the minister was able to introduce selective incentives into the program. These worked to induce individuals to become involved in providing the collective good. Their benefits were above and beyond the benefits accruing to all members of the community. The problem is determining which "extra" or "selective" benefits will induce individuals to become involved. While specific benefits which motivate individuals will be discussed below, it will be helpful to keep in mind that the organizer must be capable of determining the status and specific characteristics of potential participants to devise successful selective incentive structures.

Another mechanism that can be used is finding a "privileged" group. By analyzing who benefits from the program, you may find a few who will benefit more and, thus, will have an incentive to supply the collective good without additional selective incentives. An example may clarify this point.

In another community, a major problem was the declining water quality in a local lake. The lake was important to the community because it had a beach, picnic area, and playground. It was a collective good for the entire community. One individual in the community continually pushed and encouraged efforts to clean-up the lake. Through his efforts, other people got involved; state specialists were brought in for consultation, the community increased taxes to pay



for improvements, and the problem was solved. Everyone in the community benefited, but the one individual who lived on the lake had gained some additional benefits (both lifestyle and economic).

The pivotal point is that the collective good was provided to a latent group through the actions of a privileged group without additional selective incentives. A number of questions about the nature of the group, incentives required, and so forth, must be answered before setting up a program. It may be helpful to outline a few steps in this process.

The first step is to be *selective*; determine whom you want to involve in the program and why. It does little good to say that everyone should be involved because there are generally certain groups which you target, or would like to target, for specific inclusion. For the individuals in these targeted groups, you will have to identify their individual and social characteristics and the types of things which might motivate them.

The second step is to determine who benefits. Will anyone or a small subset of these potential participants benefit to such an extent that they might be willing to bear a substantial portion of the costs (e.g., time, effort) of providing the collective good? If so, concentrate on convincing this privileged group that provision of the collective good is enough in their interest to justify their paying the full cost (or at least the major portion). If not, one needs to precisely outline the inducements required to involve selective members of latent groups. For some retired persons it may be a chance to assume responsibility and show the community that they still have value. For members of another group it may be the opportunity for personal growth and utilization of their potential. The important task is to identify how to supplement the collective benefits with selective benefits that fulfill a "need" of the members of the targeted groups.

## The Range of Incentives

In the examples cited earlier, there were combinations of incentives used by leading individuals and groups to promote involvement and participation. As Extension staff we have to be "on our toes" about the creation and use of new incentives. There are broad categories of incentives that groups and organizations can offer which motivate people. One obvious category is money. Money and other monetary rewards motivate many of our actions. However, few Extension programs rely on monetary incentives to encourage participation. Many people are motivated by desires (or needs) in terms of their experiences, including such things as new experiences, meeting new people, traveling, or exchanging new ideas. Morals or traditions often are other powerful motivations.

In many communities, there are traditions that stress participation in programs designed to provide collective goods. These may motivate everyone from

volunteer 4-H leaders and playground supervisors to Extension boards. The tradition is strengthened by individuals' internal feelings of duty and responsibility as well as by pressure from neighbors to participate (especially in the smaller communities or rural areas where the group is more like an intermediate group than a latent group). In addition to the incentives of money, variety, and morals/tradition, some practitioners stress the importance of other types of motivators such as personal growth or need for recognition.

One helpful perspective here is Abraham Maslow's observations of human needs and motivations. Maslow suggests that individual needs can be classified into five categories (Figure 2). *Physiological* needs are food, water, air, etc. *Safety* needs include the need for stability and security, shelter, freedom from pain and threats, etc. *Belonging or social* needs indicate the need for love, affection, friends, etc. *Esteem* or ego needs include needs for personal feelings of accomplishment, recognition and respect from others. *Self-actualization* involves needs for fulfillment or realization of individual potential.

Maslow suggests that these categories of needs form a hierarchy in which satisfaction of needs at

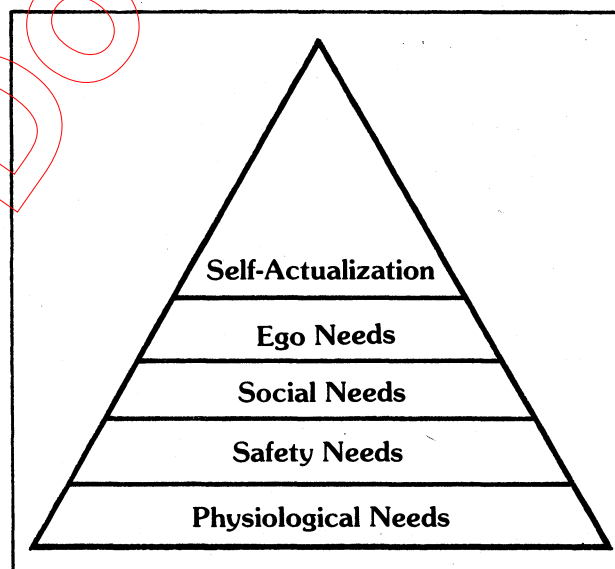


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs.

one level reduces their power to motivate and opens up the motivating force of the needs at the next higher level. In other words, lower order needs must be satisfied in order for higher level needs to become a motivating force. In addition, Maslow assumes that man is characterized by continuing desire, and that satisfaction of lower order needs always clears the way for higher level needs to emerge. In this view, man is constantly striving toward the higher level needs unless blocked by lack of satisfaction of lower level needs. For instance, individuals who are hungry, thirsty, etc., are not likely to be motivated by social or esteem needs.

Those attempting to initiate action to supply a collective good to a latent group may be able to utilize this scheme in devising selective incentives. If the organizer can structure the group in such a way that the process can selectively fulfill some of these needs, calls for participation and involvement will be more successful.

These higher level needs (social, ego, self-actualization) are actually a need for personal growth which can be broken down into a variety of specific motivations, including achievement, responsibility, recognition, involvement, independence, and utilization of potential. The need for personal growth can be a very powerful motivation for participating in your programs. However, satisfaction of the need for personal growth will rarely occur spontaneously. The structure must be established to allow for the opportunity to achieve personal growth. This structure should include (1) work which forces participants to stretch their abilities, (2) responsibilities for helping participants establish goals and objectives, (3) the means and support to achieve those goals and objectives, and (4) means of recognizing the accomplishments of individuals.

Other authors (Robinson et al., 1977) stress that to motivate individuals, the following conditions must be established:

- **Stimulation.** Participants need to be provided with opportunities for stimulation and growth.
- **Responsible freedom.** Participants need to feel that they can accept responsibility and perform duties on their own.
- **Support.** Self-confidence and self-esteem are built upon support from other members of the group, especially leaders.
- **Success.** Positive self-images call for successful completion of tasks, even if the tasks are a small part of the overall objectives.
- **Commitment.** Participants need to feel they are important and essential to the success of the project.
- **Self-insight.** Participants need goals which are realistic and within their capabilities to achieve.

## Implications for Extension Programs

As organizational members, we have to be more aware of the vast array of incentives we can use to increase involvement in our programs. For 4-H and homemaker programs, the psychological incentives like the sense of belonging to an organizational program are present. Also, the opportunities for self-actualization through unique experiences as well as social status incentives are available. These incentives help encourage individuals to become involved as participants as well as leaders. In community resource development (CRD) work, we have to

think about the incentives which community groups can indirectly offer for involving residents in work for a collective good in that community. We could rely more on social recognition as an incentive within the community after the completion of a community task. A leadership group then, is a "privileged" sub-group that receives social status for their community action.

Extension personnel work with a variety of local groups in the context of collective goods projects. To begin assessing the types of involvement and the present motivators, one needs to step back and examine your community as a disinterested observer and potential client.

If a leader or group of leaders want to motivate increased involvement, there are two potential strategies to examine. Both stress selective, non-monetary benefits aimed at emerging leaders, and both deal with social rewards and incentives as well as psychological rewards.

First, if someone has completed a set of tasks and has shown both commitment and leadership, he or she should be given some public platform or occasion upon which to receive some praise. More importantly, the individual can use the opportunity to "spread the halo" to co-workers in the community.

A second strategy stresses the "promotion" of highly committed volunteers. Marlene Wilson (1976) suggests that reliable and committed volunteers be "promoted" into management positions to reward them as well as fully utilize their skills. While the system may differ in a community context, a leader who is highly committed to a set of community defined tasks will strive, if given the authority, to accomplish community projects. The individual who completes the tasks could be given more visible and difficult tasks. This would provide for higher status leadership roles.

There are no guarantees concerning citizen involvement, and the provision of collective goods. The framework outlined here should, however, provide some cues and hints about how to motivate your constituents. Such motivation will probably not occur overnight but the successful motivator will find the investment worthwhile.

In **summary**, it is difficult to involve people in groups to provide a collective good. However, one can assure greater success in several ways:

- Analyze the collective good and potential beneficiaries to see if a "privileged" group can be isolated. Then, convince them it is in their best interest to ensure that the collective good is provided.
- Outline who you want to participate; choose targeted audiences.
- Establish which needs will motivate the targeted audience(s). This may require investigation as well as creativity.

- Structure the program to provide selective benefits to participants. The structure should be established with the conditions for successful personal growth in mind and the selective benefits should be keyed to satisfaction of the participants' individual social, ego, or personal growth needs.
- Make some attempts at creating an atmosphere of voluntary participation and involvement. You may find it is rewarding and a lot of fun!

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